



Water district puts north-south canal at top of list: Position paper accuses CalFed of caving in to political pressure

By Michael Gardner - E-R Sacramento Bureau

The giant and politically potent Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is signaling it may insist on building a new north-to-south delivery system as part of any long-term negotiated solution to the state's water woes.

Metropolitan's Board of Directors today will consider adopting a new position paper that sharply criticizes the joint state-federal program called "CalFed" for buckling under to anti-canal pressure.

"They're now seriously concerned CalFed is heading in a direction that will not deliver the goods," explained Tim Quinn, Metropolitan's deputy general manager.

If those goods, as he called them, are not delivered, Metropolitan may withdraw its political muscle and financial commitment from the CalFed process, Quinn said pointedly.

"In the end we can't support financially a program that isn't solving problems for us," he said.

How this plays out in the consensus building process of CalFed, charged with improving the state's water supply reliability and quality as part of the environmental restoration of the San Francisco Bay Estuary and Sacramento Delta, is a question mark.

In the north, farmers have long been suspicious of Metropolitan's motives and the defeated peripheral canal was opposed locally by a 9-1 margin in a bitterly divisive statewide referendum in 1982.

North-sought storage facilities, while not the focus of Metropolitan's proposed policy toward CalFed, got a shot in the arm.

The least CalFed must accomplish, the draft policy says, is a guarantee that all studies and environmental permitting for an isolated facility be completed as soon as possible "to ensure that no time or money is lost and that required conveyance and surface storage projects will be operational, when needed."

CalFed officials were traveling to the Monterey Peninsula for a conference Monday and could not be reached for comment.

While Quinn maintained Metropolitan is committed to exploring all options, it is clear that the district views a new canal as its top priority in the process.

"It's hard for us to get what we want without isolating the system to some degree," he said.

A facility that isolates exports will keep the Sacramento Delta water, harbinger of some dangerous chemicals and salinity, from commingling with drinking water supplies pumped south, Metropolitan argues.

"We cannot allow the option we care about to be shut out by the process or politics ... They (Metropolitan directors) are afraid CalFed may allow politics to override science and may allow politics to veto the (solution)," he continued.

Quinn added that Metropolitan's insistence on meeting water quality goals is not a "Trojan Horse" to transfer more supplies from the north.

"The supply is not where we're living. Quality is where we're living," he said.

CalFed a few months ago decided to detour from a route that seemed headed toward favoring the construction of what's called an "isolated facility" to bring clean water from the north to the south through the Sacramento Delta.

Instead, CalFed adopted what's called a "staging" or "soft path" approach that will implement various other smaller programs first to see if those can ease many of the environmental and water quality problems without building a controversial and costly new system, dubbed the "son of the peripheral canal."

CalFed has insisted a combination of programs may be the best route to follow, while still continuing to study the feasibility of an isolated facility.

"We're still prepared to look at those other options, but let's not kid ourselves," Quinn said.

In its draft policy up for review, Metropolitan states it "is deeply concerned that CalFed's proposed staging approach puts off making difficult, but crucial decisions regarding the long-term, best solution to the problems in the Bay-Delta."

Quinn said it appears CalFed buckled under to political pressures to divert from the best water quality solution, the isolated facility, known as "option three" among the various projects explored by the agency.

"They pushed alternative three off the table. We're pushing it back on," he said.

Quinn said CalFed appears to have moved away from working on projects to benefit urban areas.

"This is a call for CalFed to return to the middle ground," he said.

Going to a staging, or soft path approach, does not solve the ongoing problems for any urban area, Quinn argued. Only "hard path" projects are likely to get things accomplished permanently.

"It's not that we're opposed to soft path investment. We're for it. But it doesn't solve our water quality problems. They don't solve our core problems with the fish. I don't think CalFed can kid itself otherwise," Quinn said.

Metropolitan, which serves 16 million Californians through 27 public member agencies, will take up the draft policy at its meeting today.

As part of the four-page policy, Metropolitan stresses how its financial commitments to conservation, recycling, new ground water storage and transfers have helped resolve most of its supply needs.

However, it is still insisting on guarantees of water supplies during drought years, and the ability to transfer up to 2 million acre-feet during wet years.

[Chico home page](#) | [Local News](#) || [Sports](#) || [Classifieds](#) || [Business](#) || [Opinions](#) || [Features](#) || [Recess](#) || [National News](#) ||
[Weather](#) |

All rights reserved. Copyright 1998 [The Donrey Media Group](#). his content may notbe archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercialpurpose without the express written permission of The Donrey Media Group.

[E-mail the publisher](#)